



(Photo by Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma 1st Cav. Public Affairs)

## Let me help you with that!

Sgt. Michael Cockroft, a Headquarters and Headquarters Company indirect fire infantryman attached to Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, helps build a wall of sand bags at an Iraqi Army checkpoint April 21 (See story page 3)

## Aggies hold muster on Taji to remember fallen comrades

By Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp  
1-1 Cav. Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq -- Although they are serving far from their beloved alma mater, Soldiers who are former students of Texas A & M University in College Station, Texas recently took the opportunity to commemorate the lives of fellow "Aggies," who have died in the service of their country.

Taking part in the traditional and annual Aggie Muster April 21 here, the Soldiers, Aggie alumni from brigades on the base camp to include the 1st Brigade Combat Team and 1st Air Cavalry Brigade both of the 1st Cavalry Division, shared a

night of esprit de corps as well as a time for reflecting on their university brothers and sisters who have passed on since last year's muster.

"Aggies throughout the theater tonight and all over the world are doing this," said Capt. Nathan Reed, company commander, Company A, 1st Brigade Special Troops Battalion, who hails from Midland, Texas and coordinated Taji's 2007 Aggie Muster.

"This is a time honored tradition," said Dickinson, Texas native Capt. John Burescia, company commander, Company E, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment. "This is my second muster in theater since 2004 and doing this comes from a sense of duty and my responsibility

as an Aggie to maintain this tradition. It let's me know that I'm not only a member of the military family but a separate family as well. If I wasn't here doing this, I would be doing this in the states, or regardless of where I was."

According to Burescia, the Texas A & M tradition has strong military roots. The college which began as an all-male senior military academy in the 1800's eventually became a co-ed institution by the 1960's that also accepted students who were pursuing careers outside the military.

Today, the school is a mix of more than 42,000 students seeking military

See Muster Page 4

# 4th ID Commander looks at sustainment capabilities

By Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Conner  
15th SB PAO

CAMP TAJI, Iraq - The 4th Infantry Division's commanding general met with leaders from the 15th Sustainment Brigade, 13th Sustainment Command (Expeditionary), during

a visit to Camp Taji, Iraq, April 24.

Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond, along with senior leaders from the 4th ID, received an update on how the 15th SB conducts the majority of supply and logistical support missions for the greater Baghdad area.

Col. Aundre Piggee, commander of the

15th SB, highlighted how the logistical mission has evolved since the 4th ID left theater in 2006. Since assuming responsibility for the logistical mission, Piggee and the Soldiers of the 15th SB have seen their support duties grow to encompass more than 75,000 troops in three separate areas of responsibility.

"A majority of sustainment is pushed through [Victory Base Complex] or Taji to all [forward operating bases]...the battle space has changed," Piggee said.

In addition to coalition forces in Baghdad, the 15th SB also provides support to surge forces operating in Multi-National Division-Central and North.

Since September of last year, "Wagonmaster" troops have logged more than two million miles on Iraqi roads, delivering supplies without a single Soldier lost.

During the briefing, Hammond expressed amazement with how the nature of sustainment and logistics operations changed since his last tour.

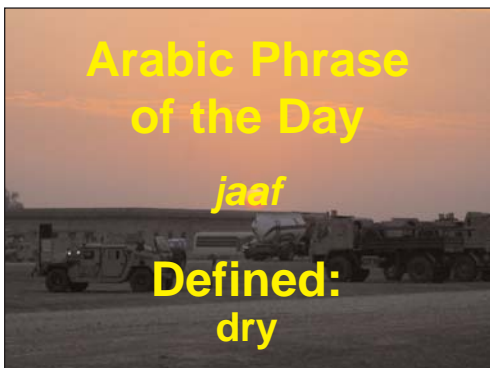
The fact that the 15th SB can boast impressive statistics, he said, is an indicator of leadership.




"There's a line between a good logistician and a great one," Hammond said. "Andre Piggee is a great logistician."



(Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Conner 15th SB, PAO)

Col. Aundre Piggee (left), 15th SB commander, introduces Maj. Gen. Jeffery Hammond (center), 4th ID commander and Brig. Gen. William Grimsley (right), 4th ID deputy commander for support, to his staff prior to a briefing on Camp Taji, April 24. The general's visit was part of a senior leadership tour of the greater MND-B battle space.



Iraq 3-Day Weather Report			
	Today	Tomorrow	Sunday
High: 90 Low: 68	High: 90 Low: 66	High: 91 Low: 66	

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# Cavalry Troops calm southern Ghazaliya violence

**By Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma**  
**1st Cav. Public Affairs**

BAGHDAD - It has been about 40 days since they stood up the first of the concrete barriers that surround Joint Security Station Thrasher. Since then, much has changed.

Soldiers with Company D, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, out of Fort Bliss, Texas, and currently attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division here, have watched the dissolution of violent activities since they began maintaining a continuous presence in Iraqi capital's once-hostile neighborhood of southern Ghazaliya.

As part of the Baghdad Security Plan's main goal to not just conduct major clearing operations, but stay in the areas to prevent militia activity from re-emerging, JSS Thrasher, named after a fallen 2-12th Cavalry Soldier, was erected on March 14 to establish a strong Iraqi security force and coalition presence in the primarily Sunni neighborhood.

"Before it was a constant fight, we had to fight to get into these places. My front yard was a body dump spot where we usually picked up four or five bodies every three days," Capt. Darren Fowler said. "(Improvised explosive devices were planted) on every major route coming east to west. (They're was) small arms contact continuously while on patrols, you couldn't do a dismounted operation without getting shot at and since we established the JSS and got a new battalion to work solely in southern Ghazaliya, verses the one company we had before, (it) has allowed us to dominate the battle space."

In conjunction with 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division's clearing operations of the surrounding area and the barrier plan around Ghazaliya, designed to enable a firm grip on the city's security, strengthened the effectiveness of the JSS.

The JSS, being such a new concept, took time to catch on with local residents. But Fowler said that didn't take too long to change, as the local populace started to get comfortable with the idea of the outpost in their neighborhood.

"They started coming here and starting saying, 'Hey, this is my problem. Can you



(Photo by Spc. Jeffrey Ledesma 1st Cav. Public Affairs)

**Soldiers with Company F, 2nd Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, attached to the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, deliver barriers for the construction of an Iraqi Army checkpoint in southern Ghazaliya April 21.**

help me with that?" and we actually go out and help them," Fowler added. "(They said) 'Hey, they're actually on our side.' Now, they are not so afraid to come here."

Information started to filter in through the tip line, a 24-hour hotline that residents can call and expose insurgent activity and prevent harmful acts in their neighborhoods. Fowler had the tip line phone for five months and never got much from it. After arriving to JSS Thrasher, he started getting six or seven phone calls a day about issues in his sector.

The combined command post configuration of the JSS allows coalition forces and Iraqi Army troops to conduct all their planning jointly, where all parties can monitor both radios and rapidly exchange information and do everything together effectively.

Fowler said that prior to the establishment of the JSS, when they were still located on separate forward operating bases, Iraqi and

coalition forces had to go out do a coordination the day prior to the execution of missions.

"But, now we can say 'We got this going on,' and we can be out in less than ten minutes on a joint patrol doing this together," said Fowler. "There is no more 'Us and them.' Everything is executed together now."

The tank officer said that during the last couple of months, he has slowly pushed Iraqis out into the lead on planning and executing missions with coalition forces slowly transitioning to an over-watch position on logistics and planning processes.

"(We're) letting them do more for their own community, which puts their faces on all the projects instead of the American faces," said Fowler, a native of Union, S.C.

Evidence of their dedication to the people of the southern region of this district, last week Lt. Col. Jabar, the commander of the 3rd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 10th Iraqi Army Division, based out of the southern Iraqi city of Basra, and Fowler sat down with sheiks, elder community leaders and other influential individuals within the Ghazaliya district.

"They explained to us their situation, what their intent is for their communities and what they would like to see happen," Fowler said. "The first thing out of their mouths was, 'We feel secure, finally. Thank you. Now that we have security this is what we want to see happen.'"

The two commanders took notes and they're starting to work on prioritizing the population's list of needs as far civil actions, water, electricity, sewage, hospital, academics, and a myriad of other projects they have not been able to focus on in the last six months due to the emphasis on the security situation.

That focus can now shift because of JSS Thrasher.

Fowler is scheduled to leave his company after 24 months in command.

"If you ask me if I did a good job in establishing security in a bad situation - yes. I feel confident that we've done that because the attacks are down in southern Ghazaliya," Fowler said. "The company established the JSS. We've done a lot of good stuff here and, truthfully, I feel confident in knowing that I've made a difference in Iraq."

# Troops celebrate traditions in Taji

## Muster

From Page 1

careers and those seeking career fields leading to civilian employment. The university boasts the second highest number of military commissions, running second only to West Point.

As the university evolved over the years so did the Aggie Muster tradition, said Burescia.

The muster began in 1883 as a track and field day for military cadets and alumni to gather and discuss their experiences on the playing field, drill field and battlefield. By 1903, the gathering was held as an observance to celebrate Texas' Independence on San Jacinto Day.

In 1922, the event became what it is today with the tradition of holding a muster every April 21st to include a roll call of members who have passed on.

Aggies began gathering worldwide

in 1929 to hold the muster meetings even though they might be spread across the globe in cities and towns far away from College Station, Texas, said Burescia.

He added that this was the time in which the tradition took on a mantra that originally was written in 1923 explaining that "if there is an A & M man within one-hundred miles of you, you are expected to get together, eat a little, and live over the days you spent at the A & M College of Texas."

During World War II, the most famous Aggie muster took place in 1942 as Gen. George Moore held an Aggie Muster with 25 of his men on the island of Corregidor, Philippines while under enemy artillery fire and just days before the Japanese took the island, said Burescia.

Most of Moore's fellow Aggies were later killed on the Bataan death march. Shortly after the war in 1946,

Aggies returned to the island of Corregidor to remember their fellow A & M comrades by holding another muster there on the spot where Moore held his muster in 1942.

"We've seen the photos of the (1942) meeting on Corregidor numerous times," Burescia said. "So for us doing this while we're deployed, I think Soldiers know the importance and see it as us carrying on what they did."

During the memorial ceremony here, members of Taji's "Aggie family" held speeches, read poems, sang their alma matter's songs, lit candles of remembrance for Aggies who have passed on in the past year and sounded out a roll call for the deceased members.

A table was set near the speaker's podium for the event which was decorated with a single candle and a Texas A & M table cloth in the school's colors of maroon and white. Photos of six deceased Aggies, military service members who died over the past year were placed on the table.

"I'm proud to stand among you," began Lt. Col. Scott Efflandt, commander, 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, who served as the main speaker for the event. This is a time for us to gather with and draw strength from each other and rekindle our commitment to our values. We will relive our college days and remember those who are no longer here."

Efflandt added that Aggies who gave the ultimate sacrifice have shown unwavering "selfless service while answering the call" to serve their nation.

He also made a historical reference to Gen. Moore's men.

"When they received orders to war, the call to service, they never left behind the traditions that they knew were important," said Efflandt. "That's what defines Aggies."

After the commemoration, the A & M alumni dined together and talked about their days as students at the university.



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Jon Cupp 1-1 Cav. Public Affairs)

**Soldiers on Camp Taji, Iraq who are alumni from Texas A & M University light candles in remembrance of fellow Aggies who have died over the past year during the 2007 Aggie Muster held April 21 on Camp Taji, Iraq.**



# Titanium bracelets a daily reminder of aviation heroes

By Spc. Nathan Hoskins  
1st ACB Public Affairs

CAMP TAJI, Iraq - When most Soldiers receive recognition for acting gallantly in battle, many respond with "I was just doing my job." Some don't get that chance.

While many gave their lives to help a country become stable, none should ever be forgotten. And that is the hope of the family and unit of Chief Warrant Officer 4 Keith Yoakum, one of four AH-64D Longbow Apache Helicopter pilots from the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, who have sacrificed everything for the safety of others.

On Feb. 2, 2007, Yoakum and his co-pilot, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jason DeFrenn, both of Company A, 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, began taking fire from enemy on the ground. Their wingmen, in another aircraft, were getting hit as well. But instead of heading to safety, Yoakum and DeFrenn stayed in the fight to help protect their wingmen, said close friend, Van Buren, Ark., native Chief Warrant Officer 4 Chris Elkins, a fellow pilot and the production control officer for Company D, 1-227th Aviation.

About a month after Yoakum perished in battle, his twin brother Kevin Yoakum, decided to memorialize him with a killed in action bracelet, said Yoakum's commander, Thomasville, Ga., native Capt. Lee Robinson, commander of the Company A "Avengers," 1st Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment.

"I had talked to Keith about the bracelets before he deployed; I gave him information to get one honoring his friend," said Kevin, who resides in Enterprise, Ala. Keith's friend, a fellow Apache pilot had been killed in action



(Photo by Spc. Nathan Hoskins 1st ACB Public Affairs)

**Chief Warrant Officer 4 Chris Elkins (left), with Co. D, 1st Bn., 227th Avn. Regt., 1st ACB, 1st Cav. Div., and Capt. Lee Robinson, commander of Co. A, 1-227th, wear titanium bracelets dedicated to pilots Chief Warrant Officer 4 Keith Yoakum and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Jason DeFrenn who were both killed in battle Feb. 2.**

April 1, 2006. "I think we were both in agreement that the bracelet is a great way to honor the fallen."

Although Keith felt the bracelets were a relevant and significant way to remember those who gave the ultimate sacrifice, those who knew him well felt he would have made fun of the idea of one being made for him, said Elkins.

"His personal opinion would be that he didn't deserve [to be memorialized], but he's touched every one of us," Elkins said. "It's the least we can do for somebody that gave the time that he's given to everyone of us."

Yoakum made a significant impact in every life he touched, said his usual co-pilot, Palisade, Col., native Chief Warrant Officer 2 Brian Carbone, a pilot for the Avengers.

"Keith was my mentor, my teacher and my really good friend," Carbone said. "He was the hardest working man I ever saw, and his passion for the job

and being a pilot and flying was contagious. It affected everyone around him."

Originally, Kevin made the bracelets for himself, his siblings, his parents and Keith's family. But he then decided to send the design to Keith's longtime friend Elkins.

The company who made the bracelets, provided Keith's wife and two daughter's their bracelets for free, said Kevin.

The bracelets, made of titanium, have the pilot's names and the date they gave their lives, along with an Apache helicopter on one side of the names and the crossed sabers on the other, said Robinson.

Kevin wanted anyone who knew and loved Keith to have the opportunity to wear the bracelet. It signifies the importance of never forgetting the sacrifices made by Soldiers in combat, he said.

"He didn't have to come here. He had already been accepted to go fly for the Golden Knights [the Army's parachute

team] which is obviously a cherry assignment for anybody to do," Robinson said. "But he turned it down. The reason he did was because he felt he was needed out here."

"Keith had told me that he needed to be there, that just having his Apache in the air over the guys on the ground made all the difference in the world," his brother said. "Someone has to be there to watch over those kids. He thought that protecting the ground guys was worth the risk."

"Some of the fondest memories I have of my life are flying with [Keith] out here. It was a great experience," said Carbone, choking back tears. "As far as the bracelets go, they look nice, but I hate looking at it. I wear it for [Yoakum and DeFrenn]. I wear it for them, because - even though it hurts to look at - it's a reminder of their friendship."

"The issue of whether they're heroes or not - they are absolutely heroes," said Elkins. "[People] owe their freedom and the things they sometimes take for granted every day, to these two and those who passed before them. They were absolutely wonderful Americans."

"They lived extraordinary lives and the way that he died was no surprise, because that's just the kind of people both of these guys were," said Robinson. "You won't find finer people anywhere in the country. It's a shame that sometimes our country's best have to give it all to keep going what we have going, but they were ready to make that sacrifice."

The Avengers continue to fly 24-hour operations throughout Baghdad, providing critical combat support to coalition forces.